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Does South Africa Have a Future?

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Following is an address by Alan L. Keyes, Assistant Secretary for International Organization Affairs, before the National Urban League's annual conference, San Francisco, July 21, 1986.

Thank you very much. I especially would like to thank all of you and my hosts of the National Urban League for the opportunity to speak with you this evening about a topic which I think is one of the most important and pressing on the agenda of the United States today and the topic on which it has always been important and becomes increasingly important that there should be extensive public dialogue, discussion, and understanding as we try to work out in common amongst ourselves an approach that will assure that the United States makes the best possible contribution to the struggle against injustice in South Africa and to the effort to build in its place a truly just society.

I guess the motto of my thinking about this subject has always been twofold. The first is to remind myself of the quote from *The Federalist Papers:* James Madison, when he said that "justice is the end of government, it is the end of civil society, it will be pursued either until it be obtained or until liberty be lost in the pursuit." You know Madison and how much he was attached to liberty; you know he was saying something very profound there. He's saying that justice in politics is the single most important motivating factor. It is one thing that can never be neglected or forgotten because if you neglect it or forget it, you will lose the most precious political thing.

The other is a sentiment that Martin Luther King was fond of: "True peace is not merely the absence of some negative force, tension or war, it is the presence of some positive force, justice, good will, brotherhood."

And the two things together mean that justice is of overriding importance but that it must also be conceived of as a positive good.

An Escalating Cycle of Violence

In the past few months, Americans have become more intensely aware of the violent and tragic situation in South Africa. We have witnessed an escalating cycle of violence and repression accompanied by mounting international pressures for effective action against the apartheid regime. Calls for severe economic sanctions against South Africa, once confined to the halls of the UN General Assembly, are being sounded from platforms around the country and the world. After an abortive effort to mediate among the opposing factions, the Commonwealth's Eminent Persons Group joined the rising crescendo. Some weeks ago, in response to these pressures, the U.S. House of Representatives passed legislation that would impose severe economic sanctions against South Africa.

People everywhere are outraged by the reprehensible abuses inherent in the South African Government's efforts to maintain the unjust apartheid system. Many regard punitive sanctions as the only way to express this outrage, despite persistent doubts about whether they will, in fact, help to achieve the desired goal of justice in South Africa. Because the injustice is so great, because the anger and frustration in the face of repression is so strong, it seems almost a travesty to employ deliberate, patient, careful analysis to devise an effective strategy for promoting justice in South Africa. The heart cries out for action, impatient with the trammels of thought. The heart says that repression must end, no matter how. The heart says that injustice must cease, no matter how. The heart says that apartheid must go—not in a year, a decade, or a generation, but now.

The heart cries out, the heart speaks, the heart demands—but cries are not enough, speech is not enough, demands are not enough; defiant outrage, anger, and condemnation are not enough without an effective strategy for action. The world today is burdened with the tragic consequences of righteous passion undisciplined by careful thought. Not every crusade against evil and injustice leads to the promised land. Many instead are lost in a wilderness of violence, a vicious circle of repression, retribution, and revenge. Will this be the fate of South Africa? Will the just demands and hopes of a people long oppressed end in a quagmire of civil war—black against white, black against black, white against black

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against white—until equality in suffering and atrocity grimly refutes the hateful premises of racism?

In a world beset by so many ills and host to so many deadly and intractable conflicts, it is awfully hard to see through the ugly realities of present-day South Africa to a better day. Why should South Africa fare better than Lebanon, Northern Ireland, Cyprus, Chad, Ethiopia, Angola, Iran, and Iraq? What will keep it from this tragic roll of countries burnt out with conflicts no one in the world knows how to end? The South African situation has all the qualifications for inclusion. On the one hand, people determined by any means to throw off the yoke of physical oppression and indignity imposed upon them by the heinous apartheid system. On the other, people too crudely arrogant or terrified to share power or to use it well. Bound together now by the iron bands of a long and bitter history, they must live and let live or kill and be killed together. On the one side, the advantages of a just, angry, and unquenchable determination to be free. On the other, the advantages of technology, organization, and the residue of a stubborn and bigoted national spirit, crystallized in bitterness after the Afrikaners suffered defeat at the hands of what was then the world's most powerful empire. The one side will never give up, for suffering only sharpens the thirst for justice. The other will not easily yield, since fear and misbegotten pride are often willing partners in self-destruction.

As these antagonists come to grips, not only South Africa but the whole southern African region will be embroiled in conflict. The states around South Africa surely will not sit passively by. The South African Government has repeatedly demonstrated that respect for boundaries and the rule of law will not constrain the death throes of apartheid. The defenders of the present regime will lash out at the surrounding states, making them choose between insatiable war and ignominious passivity. In each neighboring state, they will fan the flames of internal conflict, vindictively determined that if their power is to be broken then the hopes of all southern Africa will be reduced to ashes.

Now there are some who contemplate this prospect with grim resignation. I think they feel that if this is the price that must be paid to end the long nightmare of apartheid, then so be it. Yet no one can guarantee that the nightmare of apartheid will end before the nightmare of war and mutual atrocity has established itself as a permanent reality. No one can say that the whirlwind of violence will not give birth to a tyranny of violence, rejecting racism only so that it may oppress all equally. Is this the justice for whose sake apartheid is condemned? Is this the future for which the oppressed victims of apartheid have suffered and struggled and died and are dying today?

Apartheid and the Struggle for Justice

Apartheid is the evil against which we fight, but we do not fight against evil for the sake of evil. We fight against evil for the sake of a present and future good. Without the sense of a positive good to be preserved and realized, the struggle against evil is determined and defined by evil itself. The oppressed see themselves only with the eyes of the oppressor. They fear as he would have them fear; they hate as he would have them hate; they kill as he would have them kill. They react according to a logic determined not by their own good but by the violence, fear, and hatred at the heart of the evil they seek to undo.

Such logic can be the basis of struggle but not of victory, for true victory is achieved not when the present enemy is vanquished but when a better destiny is won. To achieve that destiny, it is not enough to know what evil we fight, we must know the good we seek to achieve. It is not enough that we seek to destroy apartheid unless, in the process, we see and help to build the foundations for a South Africa that is just, democratic, and free. Yet how is it possible to see the ingredients for such a future in the present welter of stubborn discrimination, injustice, physical brutality, and oppression?

Clearly, it is impossible if we allow the reality of apartheid to blind us to the complex reality that is South Africa itself. It is unfortunate that among the chief victims of apartheid is the ability to see beyond the premises of racism that apartheid represents, to see without racial blinders the problem of governance and nation-building that confronts the whole South African people. Apartheid is not unjust only because it is racist; it is unjust because it manipulates racism in order to achieve the arbitrary domination of the whole society by one group or faction within it.

Historically, I think apartheid had the twin purposes of neutralizing the power of the English-speaking whites in South Africa while guaranteeing the political supremacy of the Afrikaners. It achieves these purposes by isolating whites within the false solidarity of a racist enclave. Within this all-white enclave, the political power of the more numerous Afrikaners counterbalances the economic power of the more wealthy English-speaking community. At the same time, the resentment engendered by racist practices prevents cooperation, and has prevented it, between the English and the nonwhites to challenge Afrikaner domination.

In South Africa, therefore, the injustice is not simply racism, it is the arbitrary domination of one faction of the society, skillfully manipulating and employing racism to keep all its other elements in check. But if the injustice lies in factional domination, justice cannot be achieved simply by substituting the tyranny of one faction for that of another, even if the new faction was a majority of the population. Justice, therefore, I believe, is not simply majority rule. As an American, but especially as a black American, nothing is more evident to me than this oft-neglected truth. I often think about it—if simple majority rule had prevailed in the United States, I certainly would not be sitting up here today as an official of the U.S. Government. In the history of the United States, simple majority rule meant slavery. Simple majority rule meant Jim Crow. Simple majority rule meant the unjust repression of a vulnerable minority.

Fortunately, the basic principles of the American Constitution did not sanction unlimited majority rule. They demanded respect for individual rights, whether the individuals composed a majority or a minority of the population. What we often forget, however, is that guarantees for individual rights were not originally intended to protect the welfare of poor, vulnerable minorities. They were intended to prevent the personal and property rights of the wealthy few from being invaded and expropriated by the more numerous majority. They were part of the overall system of checks and balances through which a political system based upon the authority of the people avoids tyranny, demagoguery, and endless factional strife. As it turned out, the same principles that protected the wealthy few from the arbitrary abuse of government power could later be invoked to protect a poor, black minority.

The American experience suggests, therefore, that when rightly conceived, the constitutional protections afforded a privileged minority can become bulwarks for all against arbitrary and tyrannical uses of government power. What seemed at first to be limits on democratic freedom were revealed instead as guarantees of that freedom. Justice, therefore, is not the simple assertion of the political power of a majority. In a just society, whether a small minority or a large majority, no one is allowed arbitrarily to dominate the whole. The power of each must be balanced and limited by protections for the power of the other.

Toward a Democratic Future

Now I hope you will all excuse me for that slight digression into political theory, but I thought it was necessary because we talk a lot about justice, but we don't think about it in great detail, despite the fact that it is a very difficult thing to achieve and understand sometimes. Injustice, not so; we all know what injustice is. We just have to watch our TV sets to know what injustice is, to know what brutality is—the oppression, the jailings of the black leadership in South Africa—just watch that, and you know what injustice is.

But justice requires some further thought; but as you can see when you think about it, it is not impossible to conceive of. It shouldn't be impossible for the whites in South Africa to conceive of either because, on the basis of the concept of democratic justice I have just outlined, it is quite possible to envisage a democratic future for South Africa that no one in South Africa need be afraid of. It is a future in which all have an equal vote but in which the power of the majority is limited and constrained by laws and practices which protect the persons and property of minorities. It is a future in which the archaic or artificial divisions of race and tribe are gradually replaced by the more productive and useful divisions of economic, professional, and social interest. It is a future in which whites and blacks understand that human beings may have more in common than language or race or even the shared experience of oppression and the struggle to overcome it. It is a future in which the long-repressed but undying spirit of black Africa joins with the stubborn pride and careful industry of white Africa in the crucible of a new national identity—one that could point the way toward the brighter future of the entire continent.

Strange as it may seem, in that future, South Africa—the very community that today maintains a system to repress freeedom in South Africa—could be the anchor and shield against repression. In the new South Africa, the white community would retain the advantages of economic power, of technical and managerial expertise, of skills invaluable to the maintenance and progress of society. Too few to dominate, they would, nonetheless, be too powerful to be oppressed. Individuals and groups that would otherwise be exposed to the arbitrary abuse of power could, by forging alliances with whites, successfully thwart efforts to rule by fear or brute force. The pattern of arbitrary rule by one man or one race or one party that prevails in so many other parts of Africa and the world could be successfully brought to an end if the whites could be brought to play a constructive role in the political system.

I believe that a just constitution for South Africa will protect property but accord no privileges to race. It will allow a certain influence to economic interests, but without recognizing such interests as the privileged possession of any race or ethnic group. By respecting the balance of public and private forces within the society, it will guarantee that all have the instruments with which to protect their interests while none has the power to destroy or dominate the interests of the rest. Taking advantage of geographic as well as economic divisions, it will aim to prevent tyranny and to compel shifting patterns of cooperation along nonracial, nontribal lines. It will aim to preserve the existence of a thriving private sector in South Africa. This sector will serve both as a refuge and a base for Afrikaners no longer able to enjoy the privileges of the present racially exclusive welfare state. It will also avoid reliance upon government power as the exclusive engine of progressive social and economic change.

Without the racist blinders of apartheid, such a future for South Africa is easy to imagine. Given the ugly realities of apartheid, it will be difficult to achieve. Yet the effort to conceive of it can help us to discern better and worse ways of working for justice and against the apartheid regime. Once we conceive a positive future for the country, we realize that our efforts now must help to build the new, more just society even as we support those forces working to dismantle the present unjust regime. Justice in South Africa cannot wait until the campaign against apartheid is over. Laying its foundation must be an integral part of that campaign. In a campaign of destruction, bombs and bullets and negative pressures might suffice, but in the effort to construct a just society we must seek to transform the pillars and walls of oppression into the bricks and mortar of a new mansion of freedom.

If we wish to foster such a process of transformation, the first step is to realize that it is a process that must involve all the people of South Africa. The common error that is made on all sides in the current discussion of the South African tragedy is the assumption that the white government and the white community are the arbiters of the country's future. Whether the goal is pressure or engagement, the primary object of every existing approach is to influence a change of heart among South Africa's whites. The nonwhite population is often perceived either as victim or threat, the target of repression or the source of angry violence.

The tragic irony of apartheid lies precisely in this insidious triumph of its racist presumptions. When shall we come to see in the angry faces of striking students not only the desperate hatred of oppression but the desperate passion for learning and truth? When shall we come to know in the grim determination of striking workers not just the burning reaction to repression but the deep will to labor with dignity, rise with merit, and pass on to a future generation a legacy of achievement? When shall we be able to see beyond the "necklaces" and battling shantytown gangs to perceive the unquenchable spirit that can light a hearthfire in the deepest poverty, maintain the bonds of family through long years of separation, keep home and even hope alive, despite every brutal blow of degradation? When shall we see beyond the categories of victimization to the strong, resilient human beings whose passion, will, and spirit are the constructive flame in which the better future of South Africa can be forged and tempered?

Despite every effort of the apartheid system, these people have already been the makers of a profound revolution in South Africa's life. We speak glibly of South Africa's mineral wealth, of its agricultural plenty, of its developed industrial economy. But whether on the land or in the mines or in the factories, the hands and sinews that have made such progress possible have been drawn primarily from South Africa's black community. Blacks comprise over 75% of South Africa's labor force, and without them hardly a crop would grow, hardly a drill or screw would turn. They are the indispensable builders of present-day South Africa, the positive power of its economic life. If they have been weak, it is only because until now, they have not been fully conscious of this power or fully capable, through organization, of transforming it into an instrument of change.

More than anything else, the growth and expansion of South Africa's modern economy have impelled the development of this consciousness. The very economic arena in which blacks were unjustly deprived of their arable land, discriminated against in wages, unjustly denied promotion for their skill and merit, nevertheless provided the framework for developing the most potent form of power in the hands of South Africa's blacks today. It is not their power to destroy that offers the most potent threat to the apartheid system. It is the indispensable necessity to South Africa's existence of their power to labor and to build. And what people should realize, I

think, is that blacks do not have this power because the South African Government permits them to enjoy it; they have it because neither the government nor the country could long survive without it. Those who talk of powersharing in South Africa as if it were only a future goal have been duped into forgetting that, despite every effort of repression, black South Africans have begun to make it a present reality. The question is not whether whites and blacks will share power but, rather, how blacks, effectively using the power they have, can work toward the justice they have been denied.

U.S. Influence in Promoting Positive Change

Seen in this light, the question for Americans and for others in the international community is not with what well-intentioned gestures we can show our hatred of apartheid and our sympathy with the suffering of its black victims but rather how, with concrete acts, we can support the expansion and use of their positive power. Will we serve the latter through a campaign which, in order to bring pressure to bear on the white South African Government, sacrifices the modern arena in which this black power is today emerging in full force? Will we serve that purpose by withdrawing our effective presence from South Africa, leaving a weakened black community alone with an armed oppressor, facing the desperate choice of combat or surrender? The proponents of punitive economic sanctions claim that such sanctions are the last means of avoiding an all-out civil war. I believe that, on the contrary, by depriving South African blacks of their most potent nonviolent tool for change, these sanctions will, in fact, make such a war inevitable. Given the future for which we hope, given the positive goal of justice for which we strive, we should oppose such sanctions—not because they will hurt South Africa's blacks but because they are not the most effective way to help them.

Our goal should be to help South African blacks transform the economic revolution that could not have occurred without them into the political revolution that is their moral right. To achieve this goal, we must not dismantle or withdraw from our role in South Africa's economy. We must seek broadly and effectively to develop and use that role in ways that explicitly enhance the actual power of South Africa's unjustly oppressed black majority. Our effort should not be undertaken in the token spirit of reformers but in the spirit of peaceful revolutionaries. Even Marx acknowledged that man has never invented a more potent tool of revolutionary historical change than the capitalist economic system. Its insistence upon profit and efficiency has little tolerance for the archaic categories of feudal tradition or the invented classifications of racist delusion. It is no accident that the South African business sector has gradually come to be among the most outspoken opponents of apartheid repression. It is no accident that South Africa's modern economic sector has yielded an ever-stronger antiapartheid labor union movement, which continues to grow, despite repeated efforts at repression and destruction of its leadership by the South African Government.

Now this does not mean, and I am not arguing, that on their own, economic forces will bring an end to apartheid. Even if this were true, it might take several generations, and we don't have several generations. What is needed is a conscious effort to harness and accelerate the effects of the financial and organizational forces of the modern private sector. We must continue and intensify the sharing and use of power in the economic sphere as a base and instrument for change in the political arena.

Now I think this could be addressed in three broad areas:

- Within the modern corporations and enterprises themselves and in their relations with the black community, and I think, for those of you who are from the private sector out there, what you should understand is that what I am talking about here is actually harder than what the proponents of sanctions are asking you to do. They are asking you to withdraw your power. In fact, I am asking you to share it now in effective ways with the black people of South Africa, to share it now by means that will involve black people in the decision-making structures of the South African economy—structures that are in the hands and within the power of corporate structures that can be influenced today by people in the American community and other parts of the international community.
- In addition to this kind of action, there should be massive support for the increasingly effective South African labor movement.
- I would see, as well, a novel suggestion but one that bears thinking on—a program of expanded capital ownership that seeks to facilitate ownership by black South African workers of shares in firms doing business in South Africa so that they will directly derive benefit from the operation of those corporations, directly see their financial and organizational power base increased by the activities of those corporations.

In line with the spirit of quiet revolution, efforts in these areas must go beyond reformist schemes to improve the conditions of life for blacks. The aim should be effectively to incorporate the black community within the power structure of the economic sector and to use some portion of the resources of that sector to support black efforts to build and sustain effective bases of economic, social, and political organization. Corporations should consciously seek to become the wellsprings of expanding oases of transformation in South Africa—the focus of peacefully revolutionary communities in which the new South Africa ceases to be a dream and becomes a powerful, incorporate reality competing with the sordid spectacle of apartheid for the allegiance of South Africans, white and black, who dare to believe in the better destiny of their country.

The American corporations in South Africa, as well as those of other foreign states, could be the best available positive leverage the international community has in that situation. If we throw this leverage away in order to create pressure, we will deprive ourselves of the ability to create change and to make the future happen now. This is not to say that these corporations or the private economic sector are the only instruments of change in South Africa, but they are the ones over which we, as outsiders, can have the greatest influence and through which we could hope to achieve the most immediate and direct effects. In a world prone to facile gestures and easily disposable moralism, it may seem better to use these instruments once and then throw them away. But I believe that such a course would be cheap, self-satisfying, and morally wrong.

I do not mean to suggest, either, that using America's position in South Africa in the way I have outlined will bring about immediate political change in South Africa, but then again, what will? I do believe it is the best way to make maximum positive use of America's important influence in bringing about the conditions for change. Because we all know the final analysis: it's not going to be outsiders who decide the future of South Africa. That future will come about only as the result of negotiations among all South Africans of good will—black and white.

It's also clear that such negotiations are unlikely to occur, and even more unlikely to bear good fruit, in a climate of violent state repression, with the most important leaders of the nonwhite community jailed and the leaders of the

South African Government barring the gates against peaceful agitation for change. Free from the racist assumptions and effects of the apartheid system, we can see the way clearly to a future—a secure future for all South Africans.

But between the idea and the reality, between the motion and the act, there falls the shadow of violence—violence to preserve evil, violence to destroy evil, violence feeding upon itself to block out the vision of a better day. Violent repression and the violence it foments are the chief enemies of South Africa's present and future hopes. If international pressure serves a useful purpose in this situation, then it should be as a means of discouraging such violence on all sides, beginning with the repressive violence of the South African state. This, not the destruction of the economic engines of change, should be America's immediate aim and the aim of all people of good will in the world at large. ■

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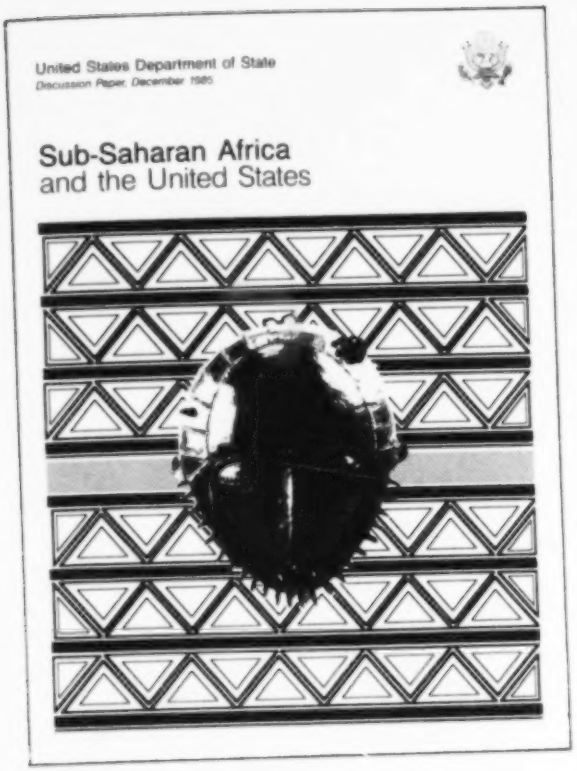

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